

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Stefan Keller and I live in Hartford. I am a member of Hartford Deportation Defense and Make the Road Connecticut. I stand in strong support of HB 6616: "An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status". Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare they need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals up to age 26 have access to health coverage.

I have been in therapy for over 3 years now to help me manage anxiety and depression and to ensure I can function on a day to day basis. This is vital to my health. I have been fortunate to have had health insurance this entire time. Thanks to my insurance I have only had to pay a co-pay and never full price. If I had to pay full price I likely would have had to have spent at least an extra \$2,000 to cover my mental health care. Some people may consider mental health care or care from specialists a luxury but for many it is vital to their survival. Unfortunately, many immigrant members of our community that do not have insurance cannot afford to access this care. For many this reduces their quality of life and may even lead to early death. This is unacceptable.

I currently work for Make the Road CT and am connected to other immigrant led organizations including Hartford Deportation Defense and CT Students for a Dream. In my 8 years of being involved I have heard countless stories. The immigrant student that could not afford dental care and was going to college just so they could get dental insurance, the person who was told to go back to their country to get urgent care they needed but could not afford, the person who lost parts of their feet and vision due to lack of access to insulin and medication related to diabetes. In a country that has so many health resources and in the state with some of the best hospitals in the country, these types of stories should not have to be told. And yet, this is our current reality.

It does not have to be. The Governor and state leaders have been touting how much more fiscally sound our state is. There is no better time than now to act to expand Husky health insurance to include all people in our state who are income eligible regardless of immigration status. Much of the cost of this program will be saved through the reduction in uncompensated care and even for the portion that is not, this is something our state should invest in. I cannot think of a better investment our state could make than in this policy.

I ask the committee to support HB 6616 and advocate for its passage amongst your colleagues as the bill moves on. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stefan Keller

kellerst3@gmail.com

Hartford, CT 06105